

**JOB STRESS AMONG SHIFT WORKERS:  
A CASE STUDY AT MALAYSIA AIRPORTS SDN. BHD. (MASB),  
KUCHING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **JOB STRESS AMONG SHIFT WORKERS: A CASE STUDY AT MALAYSIA AIRPORTS SDN. BHD. (MASB), KUCHING**

**Nancy Kok Fung Ling**

This study focuses on the perceived level of job stress and the sources of job stress faced by the shift workers in Malaysia Airports Sdn. Bhd. (MASB) Kuching. There are three selected sources of stress in this study which are role-based factor, relationship with others and the working environment. The study utilized a survey methodology. A total of 196 shift workers (61% of the total target population) from four departments were selected as the sample of this study through the use of random sampling method. The overall results revealed that 75% of the respondents reported having normal level of job stress, 14.3% having low level of job stress and 10.7 % having high level of job stress. The t-test analysis revealed that female workers tend to have higher level of stress compare to those male shift workers. Besides, the results of Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis also revealed that all of the three selected sources of job stress were significantly related to the perceived level of job stress. There was a positive relationship between level of job stress and role-based sources ( $r = 0.791$ ), relationship with others ( $r = 0.702$ ) and working environment ( $r = 0.652$ ). As such, role-based factor can be seen as the main sources of job stress among the shift workers in MASB, Kuching. The management of the organization is recommend to put special emphasis on this factor.

## **ABSTRAK**

### **TEKANAN KERJA ANTARA PEKERJA-PEKERJA SHIF: KAJIAN KES DI MALAYSIA AIRPORTS SDN. BHD. (MASB), KUCHING**

***Nancy Kok Fung Ling***

*Kajian ini berfokuskan kepada penyelidikan terhadap tahap tekanan kerja dan faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan berlakunya tekanan kerja di kalangan pekerja shif di Malaysia Airports Sdn Bhd (MASB), Kuching. Kajian ini merangkumi tiga faktor tekanan kerja iaitu faktor peranan, hubungan dengan orang lain di tempat kerja dan keadaan tempat kerja dan menggunakan kaedah survei untuk tujuan pengumpulan data. Sejumlah 196 pekerja (61% daripada jumlah populasi) dipilih secara rawak sebagai sampel dengan menggunakan random sampling method. Hasil daripada analisis menunjukkan 75% daripada responden mengalami tahap tekanan kerja yang biasa/normal. 14.3% mengalami tahap tekanan yang rendah dan yang selebihnya itu (10.7%) mengalami tahap tekanan kerja yang tinggi. Hasil daripada Ujian-t menunjukkan pekerja shif wanita mempunyai tahap stres yang tinggi berbanding dengan pekerja lelaki. Hasil daripada Angkatap Korelasi Pearson menunjukkan ketiga-tiga factor tekanan kerja yang dipilih dalam kajian ini mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dan positif dengan tahap tekanan kerja yang dialami oleh responden; faktor peranan ( $r=0.791$ ), hubungan dengan orang lain di tempat kerja ( $r=0.702$ ), dan keadaan tempat kerja ( $r=0.652$ ). Faktor peranan pekerja shif di MASB Kuching boleh dilihat sebagai faktor utama yang menyumbang kepada fenomena stres di tempat kerja. Pihak pengurusan untuk organisasi tersebut adalah dicadangkan untuk memberi tekanan terhadap faktor-faktor bagi tekanan kerja tersebut.*

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Stress has generally been viewed as a set of neurological and physiological reactions that serves an adaptive function (Franken, 1994). At one time or another, most people experience higher level of stress in this rapid changes society. The term “stress”, as it currently used was introduced by Hans Selye in 1936. Han Selye is the father of stress theory, who had defined stress as the “non-specific response of the body to any demand for change” (Selye, 1974, p. 14).

According to Oxford Dictionary, the word ‘stress’ is defined as “a state of affair which involves demand on physical or mental energy”. It is a condition or circumstance, which can disturb the normal physical and mental health of an individual. In other words, it can be seen as the perceived of any source of demand (stressors) within the environment exceeds an individual’s capability to cope with. An individual may feel stressful when he or she is under too much pressure towards the condition or circumstances which he or she facing. There are too many definition of stress and it can be defined either a stimulus or a response.

In other words, “stress can be seen as either a force acting on a person and causing discomfort (or, in some cases, excitement or exhilaration), or as not a stimulus but rather a response” (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987, p. 10). The most accepted definition of stress is that, stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize (Lazarus, 1966).

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to any events that disturb our personal balance. These events or demands are known as stressors. Stressor can be seen as the stress-causing factors in some way. The stressors can rise from the individual (internally) or the environment (externally) surrounding us. Basically, the nature and effects of stress can be best understood by saying that certain environmental variables (stressors), when interpreted by an individual (cognitive interpretation), may lead to some type or level of stress perceived by an individual.

When talking about stress, most people view it as an unpleasant threat or “bad thing”, with a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects. These effects have rarely been seen in positive situations. Thus, stress was generally considered as being synonymous with “distress” which is the physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension. Distress is also a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. Individuals believe that they must avoid stress to live longer and most people think that stress will just bring problems to them; they never think that stress actually can be helpful in certain situation when it motivates people to accomplish more. A person need to have a certain amount of stress to help them to do things better in their daily life. Therefore, Selye (1974) had suggested that any definition of stress should also include the term of good stress which is also called as “eustress”.

There are many situations or circumstances that may cause stress in our life. One important part of our lives which causes a great deal of stress is our job or our work. The stress that we faced at job area is called job stress. Generally, job stress is defined by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), as the “harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker which may lead to poor health and even injury” (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 2007).

Job stress is a hot topic nowadays. It is a phenomenon or a problem that needs to be handled by both the employers and employees in an organization. A workplace that provide stressful situation to its employees is suffering on the low worker morale, reduced in productivity , high level of turnover, health insurance claims or medical claims and so on. Work-related stress is currently one of the greatest challenges to the health of working people and to the healthiness of their work organizations (Cox, Randall & Griffiths, 2002).

Job stress is an important issue to be studied as it may directly influence the employees’ feeling of satisfaction on their job that may indirectly affects the employees’ performance at the workplace. This shows that if an employee is facing a high level of stress in the workplace, he or she may feel dissatisfy with his or her job area; this will indirectly lead them to poor performance and low productivity in the workplace. If this happen continuously, many other problems will occur such as high level of absenteeism, high turnover rate and others which may affects the entire operation of the organizations. There is an extensive support in the research literature on the “relationship between workplace factors, stress, and job satisfaction” (Burke, 1988; Leong et al, 1996; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992).

There are many factors or conditions which causes job stress in the workplace nowadays. The factors or sources can be either emerge from the working environment or the individual themselves. The most commonly found sources of job stress may include job condition, job insecurity, relationship with others or the interpersonal relationship, organizational structure and climate, workplace culture, task design, work roles and so on. All of these factors will bring certain level of stress to all level of employees in an organization. The staff mention here also includes all the shift workers in a company. In this era of increased social responsibility and accountability, shift workers are facing high level of stress in the workplace.

Shift workers are the workers or employees who need to work on shift or those who have shift work. Shift work is a period of work which is performed outside the normal spread of hours, particularly when a factory or business operates on a 24 hour basis. "In general, the term 'shift work' is quite vague and includes any organization of working hours that differ from the traditional diurnal work period; sometimes it is a synonymous of irregular or odd working hours" (Costa, 2003, p. 264).

The factors that contribute to job stress among the shift workers may include the work roles, working hours, task design and so on. It is important to study the sources of job stress of the shift workers because shift workers are the group of employees who contribute a lot to an organization. The performance and contribution of the shift workers will have a high impact on the operations and processes in an organization. Studies on this matter will enable the organization to realize on the situations that bring stress to their shift workers.

Job stress can become a serious problem if it is not managed well. A worker cannot do their job well if he or she is facing a high level of stress in the

workplace. The rapid changes and challenges in the political, economic and social structure nowadays had caused much more job stress to the shift workers in the workplace. The changes in the modern work environment brought on by technological advances, various redesign options, and organizational restructuring can elevate levels of work stress (Perrewe, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000). It is very important to find out what actually causes job stress in the workplace so that the management side can determine some solutions to solve the problems. Hence, this study is aimed to determine the level of job stress as well as the main sources of job stress among the shift workers. The location chosen for this study is Malaysia Airports Sdn. Bhd. (MASB), Kuching.

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Job stress seems to have emerged as a significant workplace problem in a number of countries in the world (Robbins et al., 1998; Siu et al., 1999). Nowadays, many organizations have started their business which operates on a 24 hours basis with the purpose to gain much more profits. This had brought about an increasing number of shift workers in the workplace.

Some companies are force to have shift workers in their company. As such, three out of ten employed Canadians worked some type of shift in year 2000/01 and most of them states that working shift was not a choice, but a requirement of employment (The Daily, 2002). Shift work is a fact of modern society. Critical services such as police and fire protection, health care, transportation, power, telephone and water are needed around the clock. Society demands and relies on these and other services and the production of certain goods are never-ending. As a result, many workplaces operate 24 hours a day which had contributes to the increasing number of shift workers.

Among all those workplace, airport is a place which operates on a 24 hours a day that would obviously show a need in the employment of shift workers to carry out its daily job. Shift workers are needed in airport to ensure that the processes, management and operation are continuously in progress. Malaysia Airports Sdn Bhd (MASB) is a private company which was incorporated in 1991 and it focuses on the operation, management and maintenance of airport. There are seven departments in MASB Kuching, with four out of those departments need to employ the shift workers to carry its daily operation. These departments are the Security Aviation Department (AVSEC), Airport Fire Rescue Services (AFRS), Operation Department, and lastly, the Engineering Department and there are three shifts being divided in MASB. Every worker who work on shift will be arranged into different shift each month.

During the 1980s, much research in the field of workplace stress had showed that there were various kinds of sources of pressure or stress at the workplace (Cooper, Cooper & Eaker, 1988; as cited by Cartwright & Cooper 1997). Sutherland and Cooper (1993) found that there are evidences from a research which recommend six major categories of stress and five of these are concerned with job related stress. These include stress in job itself; relationship with others or interpersonal relationship; career development; role-based stress; organizational structure and climate.

Occupational or work related stress is now considered to be one of the leading work related health problems, especially in developed countries where the phenomenon is well documented. National Life (1991 p. 2) reported that “job stress had become the single greatest source of stress among American workers where the number of workers who felt “highly stressed” had more than doubled between 1985 and 1990”. The Health and Safety Executive (2004) stated that around half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level



that they believe is making them ill, up to five million people feel “very” or “extremely” stressed by their work.

Besides that, the survey conducted recently by the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) (2006), indicates that this problem is most serious for females and young employees. The percentage of employees feeling heavy work stress rose from 7.6% for men and 6.5% for women in 1994 to 13.8% for men and 13.5% for women in 2001 and further to 18.9% for both men and women in 2005. The amount of perceived work pressure is not related very closely to seniority on the job, but has a definite relationship to age, education, and size of company. The highest ratio of those who frequently or constantly feel very heavy work stress is found among employees aged 30-35.

The article, “Stress and depression in the employed population”, published by The Graham Lowe Group on 23 October 2006, examines stress levels among employed Canadians. The article stated that in 2002, substantial numbers of workers reported that they were exposed to stress on the job and in their day-to-day lives. High job strain happen when the demands of a job outweigh the freedom to make decisions or apply skills, was reported by 19% of male workers and 27% of female workers. As such, about 17% of male workers and 16% of female workers reported low supervisor support, and close to a third of each sex reported low co-worker support.

In addition, there are also some evidences which had shown that shift workers can be considered as the workers facing high level of job stress in the workplace. Recently, there is a Belgian survey which examines the stress levels of workers according to nine psychosocial risk factors (Guy, 2006). The study underlines the higher risk of exposure to stress at work among night and shift workers. The nine psychosocial risks as being determining factors for stress at

work include high work rate; emotional workload; under-utilization of skills; doing repetitive work; lack of social support from colleagues or coworkers; lack of autonomy; lack of participation in decision making; role conflict; and lack of role distinction. In addition to identifying differences in stress levels according to age, sector, contract and employment status, the study also shows that people working night shifts or doing shift work have the highest probability of experiencing stress at work.

The higher levels of stress among shift workers are not only stated in the above study, but it is also confirmed and stated by many other surveys. One of it is the Flemish Workability Monitor (Guy, 2006). The study by the Workability Monitor shows that employees who have unusual working hours (night or shift work) complain more often about stress at work when their working time schedule is less predictable. Doing overtime causes even greater stress for these workers.

Apart from that, there are also some other evidences from GCIU Safety and Health (GCC/IBT, 2006), which stated about the printing industry of the trend toward 12-hour shifts and rotating shifts. There are about 20 percent of workers who are unable to adapt to changing shifts. For these workers, they think that forcing them into shift situations that they cannot handle will increase their stress and it may indirectly increase their risk of on-the-job injury.

Shift workers in airport play an important role in order to ensure the process or operations are continuing for 24 hours. It will be a problem if the phenomenon of job stress appears at the workplace (airport). The shift workers may feel stress in the aspect of the working hours, relationship with others, their roles and so on. All of this may indirectly increase their level of stress which will later influence their job satisfaction as well as their performance in doing their job. The expansion of the airport in recent years had brought to the increasing number

of shift workers needed in MASB in order to carry out the new job or responsibilities in airports. This situation had indirectly increased the workers' level of stress because they are now facing with much more workload or job. Besides, the changes in the technology, changes in working environment had also made most of the senior workers in MASB facing more stress on work. This is because most of them cannot adapt to the new changes in the working environment and their job areas.

As shift workers are so important to an organization, it is important to find out the main sources which contribute to job stress among shift workers. This study only focuses on the shift workers among Malaysia Airports Sdn Bhd (MASB). From the various sources of stress from different aspect of research, this study is focused on the three major sources of job stress faced by the shift workers in MASB, which include the role-based stress, relationship with others/interpersonal relationship, and working environment.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Job stress is an important issue to be studied nowadays as it may affects both the organization and the individual employees. It is a phenomenon or problem that cannot be avoided among all the workers in the workplace, especially for those shift workers. The changes in technology, working environment and many other job conditions may cause a great deal of stress among shift workers. The existing job stress in the workplace can give a big problem to the company if it is not managed well. This is because job stress has a direct relationship with employees' job satisfaction. High levels of work stress are associated with low levels of job satisfaction and low levels of job satisfaction may have relation with the workers' performance on the job which may indirectly influence the operation and progress of an organization.

A company (MASB in this case) which operates on a 24 hours basis cannot operate without the employment of shift workers. Stress at work not only affect the employees' job performance at workplace but most importantly, it can affect the healthy and safety of a particular employee in the workplace. Thus, this study is important as the result of this study will help all the shift workers in MASB to realize on their level of job stress and at the same time, this study will also help them to recognize and know the sources of stress or what actually create a great deal of stress among them in the workplace.

In short, this study aimed to investigate the level of stress and the sources of stress among the shift workers in Malaysia Airports Sdn .Bhd. (MASB). Specifically, this study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of job stress experienced by the shift workers in MASB?
2. What are the sources of job stress among the shift workers in MASB?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The objectives of this study can be divided into two categories which are the general objectives and the specific objectives.

#### General Objective

The main objective for this study is to identify the level of job stress and the sources of job stress among the shift workers in Malaysia Airports Sdn. Bhd. (MASB).

### Specific Objective

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- a) To describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents.
- b) To determine the level of job stress experienced by the respondents.
- c) To determine the differences between shift workers of various selected demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, working experience) in term of their level of job stress.
- d) To investigate the relationship between the shift workers' roles and job stress.
- e) To investigate the relationship between the shift workers' relationship with others and job stress.
- f) To investigate the relationship between shift workers' working environment and job stress.

### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research is shown in Figure 1. As shown in the framework, there were two types of variables which were independent and dependent variables. For independent variables, it consists of two categories, the demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, working experience) and the sources of stress (role-based, relationship with others, working environment), and the dependent variable of this study was job stress. From the framework, it was clearly showed that this study was to examine whether or not the independent variables selected will directly affects or influences the dependent variable (job stress).

### **Independent Variables**

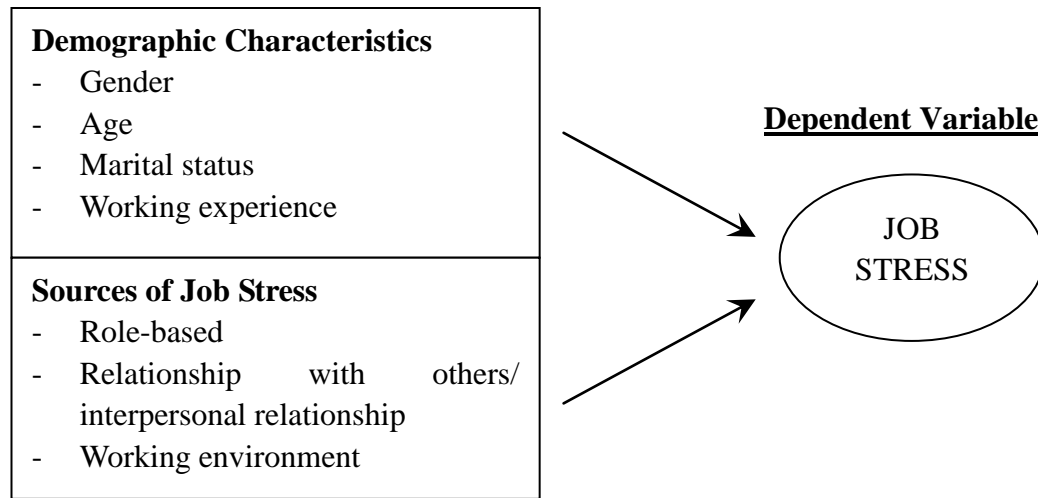


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

### **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated based on the research objectives:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between male and female shift workers in term of the level of job stress.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between shift workers of different age group in term of the level of job stress.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between married and unmarried shift workers in term of the level of job stress.

Ho4: There is no significant difference between shift workers of different working experience in term of level of job stress.

Ho5: There is no significant relationship between the shift workers' role and job stress.

Ho6: There is no significant relationship between the shift workers' relationship with others in the workplace and job stress.

Ho7: There is no significant relationship between the shift workers' working environment and job stress.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Nowadays, more attention is being trained on stress as a human relation issues in the workplace (Certo, 1995). Job stress is highly being seen as a phenomenon which brings to the problems of loss in productivity and a cause of various kind of health and safety problems among shift workers in the workplace. Thus, this study is expected to bring about awareness among the shift workers about the issues of stress in their workplace, and identify the level of job stress perceived by the shift workers in the workplace.

The finding can also act as a guideline to the shift workers in order to determine the main sources of job stress which contribute to the existing of job stress in their workplace. From this study, the employees can get a clear understanding on the importance of preventing job stress in the workplace in order to increase their level of productivity.

Besides that, this study may also assists the management of the organization (MASB) in discovering stress-related problems, the sources of job stress and the stress level faced by its shift workers in the organization. The finding may help the management of the organization (MASB) to become more effective and efficient in managing and reducing job stress among their shift

workers from each department by providing suitable coping strategies to them based on the different characteristics of each of the employees.

The management plays an important role in preventing any bad stress or distress in the workplace because an employee will become more healthy and proactive if he or she is working in a working situation or condition that is free from bad stress or distress. The World Health Organization has endorsed the view that, a healthy workplace environment which manages stress successfully will create a healthier workforce with improved quality of working life and job satisfaction (Australia – Health Targets and Implementation (Health for All) Committee, 1998).

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

The following are the operational definitions of all terms used within the perspective of the study:

**Stress-** Stress can be defined as the feeling of pressure or worry resulting from mental or physical distress or the demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body of a human being. In this study, stress is described as the feeling of pressure and worry or unpleasant emotions experience by the shift workers in MASB.

**Job Stress-** Job stress is the stress that are caused by work related stressors. It happens when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities or needs of the workers. In this study, job stress is focused on the stress that shift workers faced at MASB.